

**Gov. Bill Haslam's Inaugural Address**  
**January 17, 2015**

Lt. Governor Ramsey; Speaker Harwell; Members of the Tennessee General Assembly; Constitutional Officers; Justices of the Supreme Court; Members of Tennessee's Congressional Delegation; Former Governors; Honored Guests; Friends; Crissy: my wonderful partner in this journey and the hardest working and best First Lady in the country; Our family, which has doubled since the last Inauguration; and the citizens of this great State that we all love:

Being sworn in for a second term makes me think back to four years ago when I was up here taking the Oath of Office for the first time. Becoming a Governor is a little bit like being shot out of a cannon. There is a great view, but the ground underneath seems to be shifting quickly. First, you hire a Cabinet and then a Senior Staff. Then, you move to Nashville. Quickly your jokes are funnier, people stand up when you walk into a room, and state troopers seem to be following you everywhere. Right away the legislature is in session and before you can even find the men's room, your first budget is due. Four weeks later, it is time to give the annual address to the people of Tennessee to update them on the State of the State. My first thought was, how should I know? I just got here.

But, I did know. I knew that we had to focus on those issues that Tennesseans truly care about and are critical to our future:

First, a more effective and efficient state government that delivers the very best services to Tennessee tax payers at the lowest possible cost;

Then, better education opportunities and outcomes so more Tennesseans are prepared for the competitive world that we live in;

And finally, high quality, good paying Tennessee jobs and a business environment that gives companies the confidence to invest their capital right here in Tennessee. I believe that we've made progress on all three fronts.

On more efficient, effective government, Tennessee's financial condition is something that we should all take pride in. We have the lowest debt per person of any of the 50 states. Our tax rates remain among the lowest in the country. Tennessee has now gone longer without a significant tax increase than in any time in modern history.

Our departments are focused on providing the very best services to citizens at the lowest cost possible. We are able to do that now more than ever because we overhauled the state's outdated employment system. Today, unlike in the past, we are able to recruit, reward and retain the best and brightest to serve in state government.

In education, we are now the fastest improving state in the country. Our high school graduation rates have increased from 76 percent to 88 percent over the past decade. There are now 100,000 more kids proficient at grade-level in math, and more than 57,000 additional students are proficient at grade-level in science. The number of students needing remedial math when they

get to community college has decreased by 10 percent. We are the first state ever to promise high school graduates the chance to attend community college or technical school free of tuition and fees.

On the job front, we have added 210,000 net new private sector jobs since January 2011. For the last two years in a row, Tennessee has been named the “State of the Year” for economic development. No state has ever won that award in back-to-back years.

We’ve passed sweeping tort reform legislation and overhauled our worker’s compensation system. We established an entrepreneurial job creation strategy that has gained national attention known as Launch TN.

We’ve also brought together our tourism-related businesses to jointly market Tennessee in a way that has never happened before.

But despite our accomplishments and momentum, one of the things that I’ve realized during my time in office is that we haven’t had nearly high enough expectations of ourselves. In many ways, we’ve settled and haven’t lived up to our full potential. So, one thing I can guarantee you that we are not going to do in the next four years is coast to the finish line. The decisions that we make in the building behind me are too important; too important to the 6 and a half million Tennesseans who are alive today, and even more important for the generations that will follow us.

Four years from now, someone else will be standing in this spot and preparing to take over leadership of Tennessee. I feel an obligation to pass the baton to him or her with the state as prepared for the future as we can be. But this isn’t about who the Governor is now, or who the next Governor will be four years from now.

It’s about all of us. The Governor, legislators, state employees, teachers, parents, community leaders, business executives, health care professionals, faith leaders, and citizens of all kinds saying: “We are on the right path, but we can do better, and we must do better.”

We can be a state government that treats its citizens like customers and gives full value for every tax dollar that is paid. Tennessee can be the very best location in the southeast for high quality jobs. Most importantly, we can make sure that we get education right. There is nothing more important for us to do.

As I mentioned earlier, we truly are making progress today in education in Tennessee. It is not an exaggeration to say that the eyes of the country are on us to see if we can continue to show the significant gains that we have made in the last several years. Unfortunately, our history in Tennessee is to take two steps forward and then two steps backwards.

I think that every governor for the last 100 years has said that education would be a priority and has worked to improve educational outcomes and opportunities for our children, but for too long Tennessee has remained near the bottom of state rankings in academic achievement.

Let's seize on this momentum and on the hard work of our teachers and students to continue the progress that we are making. No other state can claim to be the fastest improving state in the country for educational results. No other state can say that they guarantee high school seniors two years free at a community or technical college.

Getting education right will go a long way to address all of the challenges we face in our state. It will mean more jobs for more Tennesseans; less reliance on federal and state services; higher incomes; healthier citizens; and the list goes on.

I wish you all could've been with me this week in Detroit at the North American International Auto Show. Like me, you would've been filled with pride as you realized the leading status that Tennessee now has in the automotive manufacturing world. As a matter of fact, for four years in a row we have been named the "State of the Year" for automobile manufacturing. Last year, Tennessee produced more than 750,000 vehicles, and the largest automobile plant in North America is now in Tennessee.

You would've been excited to listen in as scientists from Oak Ridge National Lab talked about carbon fiber technology that can be used to make automobiles lighter and more fuel efficient and that Tennessee is in the inside lane to be at the center of that innovation.

Like me, you would've watched in amazement as a car could be made to order on a 3D printing press with a total construction time of about 12 hours. In the not too distant future, a person will literally be able to design his or her own car. Again, Tennessee is at the forefront of the technology innovation.

But, like me, you would've walked away concerned. Concerned because manufacturer after manufacturer emphasized that the world is moving really fast, and the need to have workers with the technical skills and ability to keep up has never been more critical. Every company I talked to looked me in the eye and expressed their concern about whether Tennessee's workforce is ready for tomorrow's challenge. Every company emphasized to me that we needed to quickly increase the percentage of our population with a certificate or degree beyond high school. To achieve that, we have to make certain that our students graduate from high school prepared for post-secondary education.

I see the job of Governor as being part of a historically significant relay race. I was handed the baton four years ago, and it is my job to be intentional about advancing that baton during my eight years in office and handing it off to the next governor in a better position than it was handed to me.

As we embark on the second leg of this race, it is going to take all of us running together. The time is right for us to take longer strides, to run harder, to reach further, and to gain more ground.

We can do this together, and to reach our full potential, we have to do it together.

It is an honor to serve as your Governor. Every day I walk up the marble steps of this beautiful building behind me, and I count myself blessed to have a job that I love and to work with people who are committed to serving the 6 and a half million people who call Tennessee home.

Four years from now, someone else will be standing here, and I will be sitting up here watching and cheering. On that day, like this day, I will know that Tennessee's best days are ahead of us. Wishing you Godspeed, I promise to give my all for this great state that we call home.